

WILMINGTON DISTRICT NEWS
ONLINE

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Project Manager Mitch Hall, right, Elizabeth City State University's Liz Noble, left, and Tara Anderson analyze submerged aquatic vegetation data in Currituck Sound. (Chuck Wilson Photo)

WILMINGTON DISTRICT LEADS MULTI-AGENCY EFFORT TO RESTORE CURRITUCK SOUND

ELIZABETH CITY, NC- 85-year-old Yates Barber, a retired wildlife biologist from the National Marine Fisheries Service, remembers when the waters of Currituck Sound were pristine and abundant with all kinds of animals.

"Well, the water was clear and there was lots of waterfowl," he said. "But things have changed a lot. Geese used to stay pretty much in the sound, but follow-

ing World War Two they began to fly inland. Speedboats never helped by stirring up sediment. I think the decline of the food supply is what made the birds start dwindling."

Barber was one of dozens of concerned scientists and biologists who gathered at Elizabeth City State College for a Wilmington District-led think tank to find out

UP FRONT**REFLECT ON GOOD WORK IN 2006,
LET'S ROLL IN 2007!****Chris Brayman**

With the Holidays approaching, it's a time when many of us take a moment to reflect about what is going on in our lives and what is important. I'd like to share a few thoughts of mine with you. After almost four months in my position here as part of the Wilmington team, I continue to be amazed with the quality of team members

we have in our District and the quality of our sponsors, customers and stakeholders. The first quarter of this fiscal year has been particularly trying with the lack of an appropriated budget, changing fiscal rules and all the uncertainty that goes along with the situation. In spite of that, and because of incredibly innovative ideas and hard work accompanied with continual, open communications with sponsors, stakeholders and congressional staff, we have overcome immense obstacles to continue to serve the people of North Carolina and our country as a whole. I've seen Project Delivery Teams work at their best, with everyone pulling, including the non-Federal sponsor, to keep waterways dredged, flood damage reduction projects constructed, hydropower facilities rehabilitated, beaches nourished, and alternatives studied despite every reason to fail.

The Wilmington District is truly blessed with a diverse mission (which we tried hard to capture in the "Organizational Objectives" published on the Town Crier) while

still being small enough to get to know your fellow team member and realizing that each and each one of us has strengths and talents to bring to the mission we have. I've had the very distinct pleasure of getting out to projects and field offices and meeting the awe inspiring talents we have with our dredge fleet crews, survey crews, rangers, etc. What struck me is the pride which they do their job and accomplish the mission and as important, the *real* relationships people have built with their customers and stakeholders.

You all deserve to pat yourself on the back, and try to take some time to enjoy the holidays with loved ones and friends. (I will try to bring snow back from my journey to Upstate NY for all of you wishing for a white Christmas! My little boy is dying to see some snow again!) Rest and relax and let's all start the new year with renewed energy, spirit and purpose as we tackle the challenges to continue to serve the people of the states of North Carolina, Virginia and the Nation as a whole. ■

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THE TOP TEN THINGS (PLUS ONE) THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NSPS

Depending on what you've *heard*, the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) could be the best thing since sliced bread or the end of life on Earth as we know it. But what do you actually *know*?

If you have been putting off learning about NSPS, you are not alone. Early information releases were not completely clear, the system has been redesigned, and changes have continued to emerge as implementation dates loom closer. In the past month, USACE Supervisors have been receiving 'just in time' training to get ready for their own conversion to NSPS, slated for January 21, 2007.

But even if your conversion is not in a few weeks, now is a great time to start learning about NSPS! Why? Two excellent reasons:

- First, if you are a Jacksonville District General Schedule (GS) team member, your conversion date is planned for April 2007. You are almost there, and it's time to get ready!
- Second, everyone else in South Atlantic Division may convert in October of 2007. You have a whole year to practice and prepare for the new system!

1. When is your conversion date?

- Are you a Supervisor? You will be converting in **January 2007**. You have received information about your conversion, and you probably received classroom training before the end of October 2007. A few 'special case' employees belong in this conversion group. If you are one of them, you will be informed! Your CPAC is working diligently to get your conversion prepared. **If you have not already gone on line to take "NSPS 101" you should set aside time to take this on-line course.** All supervisors are required to take that course in addition to the training sessions.
- Do you work in Jacksonville District? Your conversion date is **April 2007**. **Talk to your supervisor about getting on line to take NSPS 101.** The course will help you to understand the basics of NSPS, and will give you good information about what you can expect your initial salary rate to be under NSPS. GS employees will also receive one day of 'just in time' training about NSPS prior to conversion.
- Do you work in South Atlantic Division? Your conver-

sion date may arrive around **October 2007** **It's also a good idea for you to take NSPS 101.** This course will help you to understand how to write your job objectives, the basis for your evaluation and rating under NSPS. You could use the coming year as a 'dry run' that will help you get ready to perform at your best under the new system.

2. What will your new salary rate be?

If you know your grade, your step, and the date of your last within-grade pay increase, **you can follow a guide in the on-line course NSPS 101 to learn what your base pay and local salary rate (locality pay) will be** under NSPS. That's another great reason to get on line and take the course! The course's calculator will figure out your new salary rate for you!

3. What stays the same under NSPS?

Quite a few of the things that many federal employees consider highly valuable remain unchanged under NSPS. Your benefits remain the same, including annual leave, sick leave, retirement benefits, health care benefits, and life insurance benefits. Merit System Principles continue to apply—although their application in the new system may make it easier for you to get a new job

within the federal service, or to be promoted without changing jobs. Prohibited personnel practices---well, they're STILL prohibited. Discrimination and unethical employment practices have no place in the Department of Defense!

4. What's different about my job standards?

The first and most important difference in your job standards is that they MATTER to your future a whole lot more than they did under TAPES. Did you and your boss sign off on the same set of standards year after year? Did you write job standards and then forget about them until evaluation time next year? This will not work for you under NSPS! Your job standards will be the true benchmark against which your performance will be measured. You and your supervisor will be referring to the standards throughout the work year to see how you are doing, and possibly altering them to fit changes in your work roles. Your standards will be clearly aligned to your organization's mission. Your rating will be firmly based on how you did in meeting or exceeding those standards. You and your supervisor need to spend



CURRITUCK SOUND CON'T

what's causing the slow death of Currituck Sound. The big mystery of the declines in waterfowl and fish populations lies below the surface of Currituck Sound. Submerged Aquatic Vegetation or SAV is slowly dying out. SAV provides food and habitat for fish, and, in turn, provides food for waterfowl. So, the goal of the Wilmington District and project sponsor North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and various other agencies is to find out how to reverse the damage that's been done to this fragile ecosystem. Mitch Hall is the Currituck Sound Restoration Project Manager.

"Usually when you have a project you know what the problems are and what you want to restore it back to," Hall said. "There's still debate about what the problems really are and that's why we have to collect the data. Our job is to understand the facts."

Liz Noble, the Project Coordinator for the Remote Sensing Program at Elizabeth City State University, said that the data that's currently being collected is helping to substantiate decisions for management goals and objectives.

"That's where I think we are in this meeting. I hope that the data



The outlined area gives a good representation of the immensity of the Currituck Sound Study. (Graphic by Jim Jacaruso.)

that's been collected over the last several months will be scientifically sound to help guide us when it's evaluated."

This gathering of scientific minds is slowly melding. Hypotheses are hashed out and rehashed until everyone can agree on one or several solutions to a problem.

"We're trying to establish goals that everyone can work with," Hall said. "Everybody knows that there's a problem, but fully quantifying what the problems are has not yet been completed. Everybody has seen the results of the problem,

but nobody's defined it. And to add to the pot you have different groups of people with different ideas about the issues. This is why we have to go through the data collection and modeling process so that we can understand the problems. Second, we have to propose alternatives that would address the issues."

Wilmington District biologist Chuck Wilson heads the Living Resources Work Group which addresses the status of the sound's plant and animal life. Looking at the big picture of the study he said that Currituck Sound is worth re-

storing because it's a critical component of a nationally significant estuarine ecosystem, the Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary. "The Albemarle Pamlico is one of the largest estuaries on the east coast after Chesapeake Bay, and, since the Currituck Sound is fresh to slightly brackish water, it is a unique component of the system."

Wilson said Currituck Sound supports extensive but diminishing SAV beds, a critical food source for wintering waterfowl as they migrate up and down the east coast.

"Without a healthy Currituck Sound there would be a tremendous effect on that waterfowl population." An expected cause of SAV decline, he added, is reduced water clarity. His workgroup will investigate ways to help clear the waters of the Currituck Sound. He hopes there will be modifications to

dredging practices in Currituck Sound to reduce turbidity. However, Wilson said dredging is one of many of factors that may have contributed to reduced SAV in the sound. Storm events and recreational boating also stir up sediments and extensive development in the northern watershed of Virginia increases

nutrient loads that promote plankton growth. "When you have too much plankton or suspended sediment, it doesn't allow sunlight to reach SAV."

Lead Planner Tara Anderson said the Currituck Sound Restoration Project is one of the largest "group effort" projects ever for the Wil-



SAW's Mitch Hall and Mike Wutkowski, left, and Yates Barber, third from left, listen to comments from the USGS' Jared Bales. NCDENR's John Morris, foreground, takes notes. (Heusinkveld Photos)

lington District. At least 19 outside agencies such as the North Carolina Coastal Federation, Virginia Marine Resources Division and NC Audubon Society are pooling their thoughts and ideas to find solutions to help restore the sound.

"This is a very complex study," she stated. "Currituck Sound is a huge area for our data collection effort, and it has been challenging trying to determine the impacts of man-made versus natural influences. And Currituck Sound has historically fluctuated from fresh to saltwater, so conducting a thorough assessment of this 153-square-mile estuarine system and surrounding watershed is essential for success."

Anderson feels that the group effort is key to accomplishing the data collection. Currently the study



SAW's Chuck Wilson, Team Leader of the Living Resources Work Group, sits in for discussions with various members from North Carolina government and other agencies.

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LONG RECEIVES HQ AWARD FOR COASTAL MISSISSIPPI WORK

Last February, Coleman Long drove along coastal Mississippi and witnessed the devastation that happened just months after Hurricane Katrina hit. He felt a strong desire to do something for people who had lost everything. "It was like an atomic bomb went off," he stated.

"After the ride I wanted to donate my time, I wanted to donate money and I wanted to volunteer for any kind of work. It was absolutely overwhelming to see what happ-



Coleman Long

ened to the folks down there."

What Long ended up doing was a four-month stint as Program Manager for the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program, a high-speed, high-profile program authorized to provide short-term assistance and to develop a plan for coastal Mississippi that would provide higher levels of protection and restoration for the long term. The challenge was to produce a report in six months a plan that identified near-term projects for flood damage reduction, ecosystem restoration, navigation and a plan of action for identifying long-term solutions.

"I think this was a real test of the Corps' ability to work at the regional level. We had in Mobile some of the best folks in the South Atlantic Divi-

sion."

One thing that Long said helped the Corps in identifying near-term projects was a public input process that used an ingenious system of laptop computers to provide instant feedback.

"At the public meeting the contractor set up laptops all around the room. We gave an overview of what was going on and asked for feedback. When we had identified the things that were needed we asked the people and they let us know right away what they felt was needed the most."

Long noted that SAW's Phil Payonk, who also served in the program, provided leadership, direction and oversight of this innovative people participation program. ■

NOAA RECOGNIZES CORPS FOR WEATHER DATA COLLECTION



Michael Caropolo reads the award citation to Lock Master Phil Edge.

Wilmington District Lock Master Phil Edge received on behalf of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers a 50-year institutional award for the Cooperative Weather Observation Program from Michael Caropolo, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Meteorologist in Charge of the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Wilmington, North Carolina. The Corps' contribution of five decades of consistent climate data from Lock and Dam Three near Fayetteville provided long-term climate data that forecasters have needed for precise weather predictions. Edge, one member of a large network of volunteer observers for the weather service, was recognized individually for contributing 17 year's worth of daily data. ■

CURRITUCK SOUND CON'T

participants are developing a broad range of restoration alternatives. She said that the critical role of the Wilmington District and the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources is to ensure that the results and analysis from data collection will drive the feasible and sustainable restoration alternatives that are selected. An equally critical role, she added, is to ensure that the public's voice is heard and that anecdotal data is fully considered.

Hall said the Corps and its partners have their work cut out for them. Each person, he feels, is committed to doing everything possible to try to restore Currituck Sound. Many are North Carolina or Virginia natives

like himself who've seen drastic changes to the mid Atlantic area.

"One thing I don't take for granted is what I used to see. That's what I miss. And I've seen the decline on the coast. I've lived in Wilmington for most of my life and I've witnessed significant changes here, mostly in population growth which has had an impact on a lot of the things like the environment that draw people to this area. So, from a broader perspective I see what's happened because of urbanization and poor management of ecosystems. The question is can we reverse what's already happened? The Corps is mandated by Congress to try to find a way to address some of

the ecosystem degradation issues. And if you look at how many people are projected to live on the coast in the next 15 to 20 years, it's going to be a challenge."

The project is cost shared between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Each cost share partner pays 50% of the feasibility phase costs, and the reconnaissance phase was paid for with federal dollars. ■

Currituck Sound PDT

Mitch Hall- Project Manager

Tara Anderson- Lead Planner

Chuck Wilson- Living Resources

Mike Wutkowski- Water Qual. Mon.

Debora Rowell- Admin Support

ROANOKE ISLAND FESTIVAL PARK PROJECT RECEIVES CHIEF OF ENGINEERS DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD PROGRAM

During his recent visit to the District, SAD Commander BG Joe Schroedel (third from left) stopped by Roanoke Island near Manteo to present awards to the Roanoke Island staff and NC Water Resources. From left to right; John Sutherland, NC Water Resources, Scott Stroh, III, Festival Park, Carroll Williams, Festival Park, Suzanne Godley, Festival Park, Project Manager Bob Keistler, Wilmington District Commander COL John Pulliam. ■



ANNUAL SOCIETY OF AMERICAN MILITARY ENGINEERS PICNIC DRAWS GOOD CROWD AT HUGH MCCRAE PARK

Submitted by Marilyn Knowlton and Virginia Rynk

The annual Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) scholarship fund-raising picnic was held in Hugh McCrae Park 19 October. The group raised \$940! Colonel JP Pulliam officially greeted the 53 members and guests at the picnic. The Hewlett Creek Boys, Bob Thomson, John Golden, Phil Norris, Shane Lippard, and our own Doug Wall, provided entertain-

ment. Drawings were held and prizes were awarded to the winning entrants.

The mission of the Society of American Military Engineers is to promote and facilitate engineering support for national security by developing and enhancing relationships and competencies among uniformed services, public and private sector engineers, and related professionals.

The Cape Fear Society of American Military Engineers is open to all engineers and related professions. The meetings are held the third Thursday of each month at Hieronymus Seafood Restaurant for a lunch meeting with a speaker and presentation. A PDH (professional development hour) credit of up to one hour can be earned by attending these meetings for registered engineers. ■



Jimmy Hargrove checks out his prize as Chris Frabotta and Tony Carter admire and envy Jimmy's luck !



SAME members and guests enjoy a catered pig pickin' dinner at Hugh McCrae Park

Doug Wall, facing camera, and the rest of the Hewlett Creek Boys entertain the pre-dinner crowd. Guest vocalist Wayne Bissette, left, lends his voice to the group.



WOO TEAM TRAVELS “SOUTH OF THE BORDER”

The WooTeam began its fifth meeting at the Wilmington District Office on Tuesday, October 17th. Anticipation was high because this gathering included a fast-paced agenda and some late nights on the road. The meeting kicked off with a team huddle to discuss our project, the soon-to-be-published Employee Handbook. A third draft was completed in early October and subsequently distributed to many folks throughout the District for review and comment. The final draft will be presented to the Executive Office and Corporate Board sometime in late November.

Following our huddle, the WooTeam and members of the SAD Leadership Program sat down with Brigadier General Joseph

Schroedel, South Atlantic Division Commander, and our own Colonel John Pulliam for a light lunch and lively discussion. General Schroedel provided the group with his leadership perspective stating that leadership begins with each person individually. Self-leadership provides the ability to get yourself to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, whether you feel like it or not, and still do it well. General Schroedel also encouraged everyone to seek out and participate in leadership opportunities at all levels - whether it is coaching a youth team in your community or attending formal leadership training classes. Following the luncheon everyone caravanned to Pearsall Chapel for the Town Hall Meeting.

Late Tuesday afternoon, WooTeam traveled to Georgia for the start of a two-day tour of the Savannah and Charleston Districts. We arrived at the Savannah District Office early Wednesday morning. Colonel Mark S. Held, Savannah District Commander, provided an excellent overview of the District's programs including a detailed briefing of the Military Construction (MILCON) projects overseen by Savannah personnel from Fort Stewart in Florida to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. He discussed how MILCON projects have and continue to be transformed as the result of challenges like increased construction costs, increasing workloads with shorter construction schedules, and sustaining technical competence. Colonel Held emphasized that the Corps must succeed in this transformation in order to meet the nation's requirement for quality facilities. WooTeam spent Wednesday afternoon touring several MILCON projects underway at Hunter Army Airfield. The group got an up-close look at six new Army Ranger Barracks featuring 480 two-room suites, a 70,000 square foot Brigade Office, new attack helicopter hangar, and a state-of-the-art fitness facility including an indoor natatorium, three indoor basketball courts, racquetball courts, rock climbing wall, and extensive exercise facilities. ■



The team visits a Charleston District project; the Morris Island Lighthouse.

WEBSITE HIGHLIGHTS

WITH JAN WUTKOWSKI

GRASS GIS 6.2.0

grass.itc.it/

With the release of such programs as Google Earth, computer users have access to a rather diverse

set of geographical data tools. One program that has recently been released in a new edition is the Geographic Resources Analysis Support System (GRASS). With this program, users can perform a number of tasks, such as spatial modeling, visualization, and image processing. The site also includes a FAQ section and a newsletter.



The Global Technology Revolution 2020

www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2006/RAND_TR303.pdf

The RAND Organization, in one of their most recent publications, has taken on a weighty topic indeed. Released earlier this year, this report authored by a team of experts addresses the ongoing technology revolution in a variety of sectors, including biotechnology, nanotechnology, and information technology. In this 316-page work, the authors assess a sample of 29 countries across the spectrum of scientific advancement with respect to their ability to implement a number of key technology applications, including cheap solar energy and

wireless communications

The National Centers for Career and Technical Education

www.nccte.org/

At various points in the history of the United States, career and technical education has assumed an enhanced sense of importance. The National Centers for Career and Technical Education (NCCTE), have always been intimately concerned about such matters and over the past six years they have worked “to improve the practice of career and technical education at local, state, and national levels.” Material offered here includes webcasts, podcasts, scholarly reports, and a “News & Announcements” section that gives users up-to-date information on some of their work.

ConsumerLab.com

www.consumerlab.com/

It may be difficult for the average consumer to evaluate the sometimes grandiose claims that various supplements, vitamins, and other such products make on their labels. One way to learn about products is ConsumerLab.com, which provides independent test results and information in order to assist consumers and healthcare professionals to evaluate such products. Visitors looking for information on specific products will want to direct their mouse to the “Laboratory Test Results” area. Here they can look through a list of product evaluations that include nutrition bars,

ginkgo biloba, and the ever-popular echinacea.

Identity Theft Resource Center

www.idtheftcenter.org/index.shtml

These days, people who find themselves the victim of an identity theft have a number of resources they can draw on to deal with their predicament. In 1997, things were quite different, and at that time Linda Foley found herself victimized by this crime. Several years later, Linda founded the Identity Theft Resource Center, and since then the Center has been commended for its work by the Department of Justice and Senator Dianne Feinstein. From the Center’s homepage, visitors can access victim information guides, learn about recent (and some “classic”) consumer scams.

ONE FOR FUN!

Take Five

www.utexas.edu/inside_ut/take5/

What if you could learn about how to prepare for emergency situations, explore the legends of the Alamo, and the rise of wireless communications all in one place? Sounds like a pretty good deal, and it is all possible via the Take Five website presented by the University of Texas at Austin. ■

MORALE IS HIGH AND LIFE IS EXCITING IN AFGHANISTAN FOR CONTRACTING'S CHERYL PARKS

What is your primary mission?

The mission varies. We're working on the roads, police battalion for many provinces, hospitals, etc.

What are your work/living conditions like?

Working conditions are much like there, except we have our own office. Picture college days living in a dorm and that's sort of what we have but in our own rooms.

How is the camaraderie? How is it working with active duty military members?

We're like one big happy family. We argue one minute and make up the next. But more times than not we're laughing as we work. We pass knowledge from one coworker to the next. Everyone says we in CT are an exceptional group and we are. The military - Wow!!! They're the greatest. Security is number one with them.

How do you find the Afghan culture?

They are very big on living as one family. The sons never leave home. The sons take care of the mother, father and sisters until the sisters get husbands. They are very hard working people and humble.

Do the Afghan people have an increased appreciation for the US mission in their country?

I've had quite a few locals tell me they are so happy we are here and what a difference we've made in their lives.

What do you miss the most during your deployment?

I miss my Mom (Ethel Carter- Augusta, GA) and sons (Steve and Toney Wilkesboro, NC) more than anything. I'm going to be a grandmother in April, so I'm excited about that. Also, I miss sisters, brother and church family and of course Lisa James, Coni Brandt. We look forward to mail call and get excited when a coworker or friend has a package. It's share and share alike. I'm really grateful to my Mom, my sons, Danny Kissam, Cindy Corbett, Lisa James and Coni Brandt. They email all the time with antidotes, encouraging words, pictures, etc. ■

More on Page 16



Cheryl Parks stands before an ammunition depot.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

MARY PRYSTAL – CAMERA BUG

The Wilmington District News Online brings back the feature "In the Spotlight" which highlights personalized stories of our colleagues. Why? Because after you read about the person you may have been sitting next to or casually conversed with for umpteens years you'll inevitably say to him or her, "I didn't know that about you." :-)

"I've had some kind of camera in my hand since my teens. It only got worse once I started having children and was drawn to capturing every moment of their life on paper. My children are now immune to it. Mom always has a camera on the sidelines of the soccer games, the football games, the baseball games, or in the stands of the basketball game or marching band competition. My older son (now 21) hated seeing me at every event with "that camera" in my hand when he was in junior high and early high school. By his senior year, he was asking me if I got this or that shot on the field (he was drum line captain for marching band) or that shot on the basketball

court. Now he looks at all those photos and really appreciates having a record of all the events of his life. You will see me frequently shooting his performances with the Root Soul Project (a local jazz and reggae band) where he's the drummer.

I became serious about photography in the 80s and have been shooting steadily since then. My specialty is nature and landscapes. There is nothing more beautiful than the things we take for granted every day...the fog lifting over Whiskey creek in the early morning, the sunsets over Oak Island, or the sunlight shining through the petals of a daffodil in the neighbor's yard. Although photography started out as a hobby, it is developing into a second career. Once friends and acquaintances see some of the prints, they want copies. I'm starting a website next month where I'll place several of my photos to see what kind of market there is. When I retire, I will spend my time touring the US taking pictures of the sites.

Photography has always fascinated me since being exposed to



Mary Prystal

Ansel Adams' photography when I was in high school. His black and white photographs of the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and the national parks are inspiring. Although I started out with a Canon 35mm, I prefer digital and shoot exclusively with a digital camera now. On a recent trip to Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, I took over 2000 shots. I wouldn't have taken any fewer with a film camera, it just would have cost more to have them developed. The digital cameras now are so incredible that it is impossible to tell a digital photo from a film photo. ■

MARY PRYSTAL PORTFOLIO SAMPLE



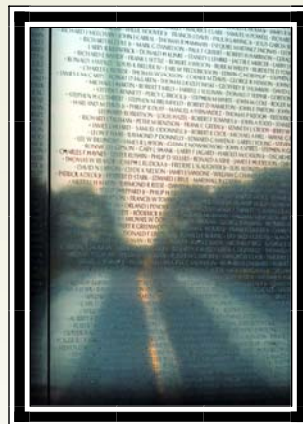
Carolina Beach Penguin



Yaupon Beach Sunset on Oak Island



Flowers and Dragonfly



The Wall



Crumbling dock at Cedar Island

NSPS CON'T

some serious time thinking through your standards for the coming work year. Even if you will not convert until October 2007, this year could easily serve as your practice session for the 'real thing.' **Take time to learn about the expected job standards in NSPS 101.** Avail yourself of any local training or brown-bag lunches that may be offered in your District! Investing in well-written standards is important!

5. How does my role as a supervisor change?

Supervisors, you will be spending more time and attention on managing and evaluating your employees than you have ever spent before. You are **REQUIRED** to counsel with your employees at least three times a year, and if you are in South Atlantic Division, you are required to counsel with your employees at least **FOUR** times a year. You will be working with all your employees to write good standards that pass the "SMART" test (**see NSPS 101!!!!**). You will adjust those standards should the employees' tasks or workload change significantly during the year. You will be writing a fairly detailed rating for your employees. Just to give you an idea, the two-page TAPES form is about to give way to an on-line 13-page DCPDS form for each employee. At some times of the year, this form will be available to employees so that they can write their self-assessments. At other times the form will be available to you so that you can complete your evaluations. Your NSPS deadlines will be **HARD** deadlines, so you will need to carefully discipline your time and work load to adequately carry out your supervisory duties and support your staff. Your best friend in all this added supervisory attention? Regular conversation and contact between you and your staff members! The more you are routinely and regularly aware of their progress and their achievements, the better you can evaluate them at year end!

6. Ratings, what are they, who will rate me, and how?

There are five levels in the NSPS rating scheme. In NSPS a 5 is the highest rating you may receive, and a 1 is the lowest. At conversion, everyone receives a 3 rating and holds that rating until their evaluation under NSPS. The five ratings are:

5 = 'Role Model'

4 = 'Exceeds Expectations'

3 = 'Valued performer'

2 = 'Fair'

1 = 'Unacceptable'

In general it is expected that most employees will fall into the '3' or 'Valued performer' range when they are rated. This differs from the current system, in which 81% of all federal employees now receive a '1' (the highest possible).

You have an opportunity to contribute to your rating by completing a self-assessment in that all important 13-page form on DCPDS. This is not 'required' by law, but common sense should tell everyone that this is a critical step to **INCLUDE**. It's your opportunity to make sure that you have your achievements for the work year on record as part of your rating!

You will be rated by your rater, a senior rater, and a Pay Pool Panel, headed by a Pay Pool Manager. If you do a significant amount of work for another organization / person during the year, you may also receive 'Guest Rater' input. The Pay Pool Panel may be made up of people from your own District, or it may be established on some other basis (such as regional). Because Pay Pool Panels have not been completely established yet, this is one piece of information about the system which will require you to 'stay tuned,' to learn more as you go along.

What if you disagree with the rating you receive? You can appeal your rating to the Pay Pool Manager. In addition, every organization will have a final review authority, the Performance Review Authority, who can change your rating.

Again (guess what!) it's highly recommended that you take NSPS 101 on line to learn more about the rating process.

7. How can I influence my rating, get salary increases or be promoted?

Of course the most important way you can influence your rating is to do your best work – following those Army values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, and Personal Courage can only serve you well when the evaluation season rolls around.

Work with your supervisor to write good standards that meet the SMART test.

Keep your standards always in the forefront of your attention. It will be a good idea to keep track of what you are doing, and see how it aligns with your standards on a regular basis. Do you keep records in your Day Planner or a diary or any other documentation of what you do from day to day or week to week? If not, you should seriously consider starting to undertake this step. Even if you are not converting to NSPS until next year, you can

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benefit from focusing your attention on what you intend to do and how well you accomplished it! If you can take time to keep your supervisor informed, so much the better. Year end evaluations will be easier for those who have been 'in the loop' all year long.

Participate in all the required counseling sessions during the year, and work at maintaining productive communication with your supervisor. He or she is receiving additional training to help with this process. You, too, can take advantage of 'soft skills' courses that are offered on line to help you communicate well.

Write your self assessment when you are given the opportunity. Remember, if you have tracked your accomplishments during the year, this should be easy!

All these steps will contribute to your rating. The higher your rating, the more salary increase you may receive.

Also, high performers can be reassigned within their pay band, and may receive a management directed salary increase of as much as 5% at a voluntary or management directed reassignment. This sort of reassignment does not require 'time in grade' or competition, as in career ladder promotions might have required in the past. If your performance warrants, you may be promoted to the next highest pay band for which you qualify, and at such times you will receive a pay increase of at least 6% or as much as 20%. **Again, to learn more about your increased opportunities for higher pay or promotion under NSPS, take NSPS 101!**

8. What is a reassignment?

A reassignment can mean many things under NSPS. This is where the 'flexibility and agility' so desired by DoD comes into play. Reassignment empowers management to quickly put skilled and talented people to work where they are most needed. For employees, this is an opportunity! You can seek out opportunities to move within your pay band and career group to expand your experience, contribute to missions in a new way, or enhance your career. When you volunteer for a reassignment or when your supervisor moves you to a different task, it's possible that you may also receive a pay increase of up to 5%. You may be reassigned more than one time in a calendar year. On the other hand, a reassignment can be undertaken as an adverse action, and supervisors can also cut employee pay by as much as 10% at a reassignment. Do you want to know what all this means to you? **Take NSPS 101 to find out what you need to know!**

9. What's the worst that can happen to anyone?

This section should not be frightening to anyone who is

doing their job! The playing field is level on the day you convert to NSPS. You get born into the new system as a 3, a 'Valued Performer.' There is no forced bell curve that demands anyone be assigned to the bottom rung of the ladder. Thus, everyone really does start out in that high tide that raises all boats!

Also, remember that Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices don't change under NSPS.

However, it is possible that unprofessional behavior, wrongdoing, or unacceptable performance could result in some severe consequences that an employee would feel and see in the paycheck as well as in performance evaluations or other potential disciplinary actions that remain on the table under NSPS.

The good news is that NSPS counseling and other structural features will call for clear documentation and clear counseling when performance fails for some reason. All of the means for turning around a bad situation remain available under NSPS as under the current system. Employees and supervisors are required to confront reality on a regular basis. In fact, NSPS is designed to help organizations face up to and deal with poor performance rather than sweep it under the carpet.

Now what is the bottom line? An employee who receives a 1, or unacceptable rating, will not only receive no pay increase to base wages and no performance award. That employee will also NOT receive any locality pay differential. Also, during the course of the year outside the rating period, a supervisor may reassign an employee for unacceptable performance, and may impose a pay cut of up to 10 percent. The consequences for bad performance, like the rewards of good performance, will be felt strongly in the pocketbook. The incentive to improve performance will be clear.

10. What's the best that can happen to me?

Are you a superstar? NSPS will give you the opportunity to see the evidence of your excellence in your paycheck and your career assignments. You can rise quickly in the organization if you are truly a 'Role Model' level performer. It is now possible that you may receive a pay raise more than once during the year. At promotion, you could be given a handsome pay increase. Best of all, you are not required to ticket-punch your way upward year by year at a pace slower than your abilities would warrant.

It's true that NSPS is not designed to be like Lake Wobegone, where 'everybody is above average.' In the pre

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sent personnel system, about 81% of all employees are rated as a 1, the top rating. Accordingly, performance awards and compensation tend to be shared a bit more evenly across the organization. Over time, NSPS will give some people the opportunity to move ahead, move up, and reap more rewards because of their superb performance.

Plus One!

Throughout this summary introduction to NSPS, you have been seeing reminders to **take NSPS 101 on line**. If you only carry away one message from this article, that's the most important! Avail yourself of training opportunities so that you can understand the new system. NSPS 101 is available on line at (<http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/nsps101/nsps/index.htm>)

Reports on how long it takes to go through the course vary, but it will probably not take you more than two hours at the most. Your District will be encouraging the work force to take the on-line course at different times, depending on the District's expectations about when you will convert and what your supervisor wants to do to prepare you for conversion.

In the immediate pre-conversion period, everyone will receive a one-day classroom training that covers much of the same material covered in the training that was given to supervisors. Districts are planning a variety of other training and discussion opportunities to help the work force get ready to implement NSPS and thrive in the new system.

Be proactive! Participate in all the training and preparation opportunities your district offers. Discuss NSPS implementation with your supervisor. Whenever your position converts, your efforts will be well spent. ■

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM CHERYL PARKS AND HER USACE COWORKERS IN AFGHANISTAN!

